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ABSTRACT

Continuing professional education activities offered off-campus by satellite by the University of Victoria, British Columbia, are discussed. One- to three-day workshops and off-campus degree programs are offered throughout the province by the university. Both increased demand and economic factors have encouraged the use of distance education delivery methods. Since 1978 the university has provided live interactive satellite programming, most of which has been credit courses, along with some professional development activities and community education programs. Credit course offerings have been a major component of part-time degree programs in nursing, public administration, and education. Child care and social work programs have used other distance delivery systems. Advantages and problems associated with public access delivery systems for continuing professional education are identified, along with trends in continuing professional education. Enrollment in credit courses has continued to increase and the demand for courses is starting to exceed the satellite time available. As a result, delivery options are being enlarged. (SW)

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The Continuing Professional Education Interactive Satellite Interface

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THE CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION INTERACTIVE SATELLITE INTERFACE

As Allen Tough (1981) documented, professionals as a group are heavily committed to life-long learning. The expanding knowledge base, the increasing sophistication of clientele, the issue of compulsory relicencing all act as forces on the professional and encourage him to keep abreast of developments in his field. Yet despite natural inclination and external motivation, the reality of continuing professional education may be difficult to achieve. In British Columbia, an area of 366,255 square miles, with a population of nearly three million, many professionals who live outside the urban population band which borders the southern boundary of the province have few opportunities for professional development. Living in small rural communities in relatively isolated areas, these professionals find that professional development activities are frequently oriented to their urban colleagues, the costs of travel are prohibitive, and the time away from their profession too lengthy.

Traditionally professional organizations looked to the universities to provide continuing education opportunities, but today this is no longer the case, with professional schools, universities, community colleges and professional associations themselves all vying for clientele. Hohmann (1980:90) in the recent book Power and Conflict in Continuing Education concluded that there are three models of current practice; (a) the service model where the organization acts as a modern-day missionary providing continuing education to knowledge-hungry practitioners; (The organization does the needs assessment, program design and content choice.) (b) the marketing model where product marketing

techniques are used to determine what will sell, and to help package it to ensure that it will sell; and (c) the performance model where surveys of members' practices and extent of knowledge are used as basis for developing continuing education programs, often on an individual basis. Hohmann goes on to suggest that cooperation between organizations could provide for a more realistic and appropriate model which would combine the quality of the performance model with the organization and planning involved in the other two models.

At the University of Victoria, the Division of University Extension coordinates all continuing professional education activities from its professional schools, Law, Education, Child Care, Social Work, Health Sciences, Nursing, the Sciences and Public Administration. In all of these fields there are strong professional associations. To date, the University has tended to use Hohmann's service model and few associations have adopted the performance model given the extensive commitment needed in personnel and finances.

The University's mandate to serve the higher education needs of adults throughout British Columbia has resulted in the development of an extensive off-campus operation which organizes one- to three-day workshops by faculty throughout the province based on specific requests. Beside these credit-free activities, University Extension also coordinates various off-campus degree programs. While in both areas the majority of the programming is face-to-face, the escalation in demand combined with the economic factors involved have encouraged the use of distance education delivery methods.

Recently as part of an overall examination of its goals, the Division identified trends in continuing professional education and considered their impact on its professional continuing education sector. The first trend identified was an increased emphasis on space-free, time-free education. There has been a general movement away from the annual conference as the major continuing education activity, to workshops or sessions which meet the concerns of a small group. These in turn are being increasingly augmented and possibly superceded by opportunities for self-directed learning. At the same time there has been a supporting trend away from general topics to specific information.

Secondary, professional associations are becoming much more active in the identification of their member's needs. From the university's point-of-view this suggests that we may be increasingly presented with requests for programming, without any prior involvement in needs assessment. Thirdly, as a corollary professional associations may offer the programs themselves, in effect becoming a competitor with educational institutions. The potential waste in time and resources strongly encourages collaboration. Fourthly, the university may find its leadership emerging in specific areas such as evaluation, or instructional design rather than covering the broad spectrum of organizational skills identified in the service model. Furthermore, since the new knowledge being developed is as often outside the university as within it, professional organizations may seek the content expertise elsewhere.

Fifthly, a trend towards the development of interprofessional programs was identified. Especially in areas in the social sciences where knowledge bases are shared, or where specific professional skills are similar there is increased

acceptance of interpersonal programming. Finally, the present economic times constrain the amount of programs offered by professional associations or a university on their behalf. Increasingly, the cost of continuing professional education will be borne by the individual practitioner. In turn, the demand for specific content, individual, self-instructional learning materials will increase. Therefore, the use of new technology and distance education delivery systems will receive increased emphasis. An examination of part-time credit programming reflected similar trends including the use of degree programs as a major component of recurrent education.

At the University of Victoria, we have been involved in the delivery of learning materials to distance learners since 1977. At first we used print with some audio-cassette support only. Then in 1978 we were involved in experiments with the use of Canadian Hermes satellite for education, and following these with the subsequent ANIK-B and ANIK-C satellites. The system was originally interactive via the satellite. In other words, students at receiving centres, most often in community colleges could see and here the instructor via television and the student could talk to the instructor by merely pressing a button and speaking into the mike or speaker phone in front of him. Such a system provided a situation similar to that in a face-to-face class in that students could interject and talk to the instructor and each other and be heard by all participating.

When the experimental phase ended, the government on the basis of the data collected, decided to set up a non-profit society, the Knowledge Network of the West, (KNOW) to act as animator and carrier of educational programs in British Columbia. The first result was a rapid escalation in the quality of

the television facilities which was reflected in the programming. Another result was the development of a public television network. British Columbia is the most highly cabled Canadian province with over 86 percent of homes linked to a cable network. Once the signal was carried via cable it became available in people's homes. The 2-way interactive audio capacity of the satellite became impossible to use. Instead the learner now accessed the instructor via a long-distance telephone call which was amplified so that the student's questions as well as the instructor's response could be heard. While the use of two toll-free lines made the instructor accessable to everyone, the audio system no longer allowed for the flow of natural conversation among students. Instead each spoke to the instructor only.

Since September, 1982, we have been sending out video signal via microwave to the Knowledge Network centre in Vancouver where it is uplinked to the satellite. This has enabled us to use our own studio, saving a two-hour ferry trip to Vancouver and providing a much less traumatic experience for instructors and to experiment in linking a audio-teleconferencing bridge to the long-distance telephone lines, thereby allowing a number of students to converse with each other and the instructor at the same time.

Since 1978, we have produced four-hours of live interactive satellite programming during the September to May period each year. Most of these have been credit courses, some have been professional development activities and a few are community education programs. The continuing professional educational programs vary from "Nursing Assessment", a professional update for nurses which had 22 - 2-hour sessions, to single time programs such as "Madeline Hunter talks to teachers", a one-hour program where Madeline Hunter, who was on campus

as a Landsdowne Scholar outlined her research on secondary school teaching and received questions from teachers throughout the province. On the drawing board, is a professional development program for teachers, foster parents and community workers on "Handling Problems at Home and School". This will use audio-teleconferencing delivery with print and video support, and can be repeated as necessary. We have subsequently repackaged some of these programs into a self instructional or small group format with videotapes and accompanying self instructional materials.

Our credit course offerings have been part of on-going part-time degree programs. They include a series of Nursing courses with credit to a baccalaurate degree in Nursing. In Public Administration, the courses form part of a diploma program for public sector employees which has baccalaurate status with the School towards a Masters degree. In Education, our most recent offering was a course from the elementary undergraduate program and the course development has started on another course in that program. Our Childcare and Social Work part-time credit programs have used distance delivery methods other than interactive satellite.

The use of a public access delivery system for continuing professional education has certain advantages:

- You can reach a large audience at little inconvenience to themselves;
- You can provide up-to-date information soon after it becomes known;
- You can provide programs for professionals which they would be unable to obtain in any other way due to geographic location, costs or time constraints;
- Since it is a public network, you also may educate the consumer as well as the professional.

There are however, also a number of problems associated with interactive satellite delivery of continuing professional education:

- Because it is publicly available at the flick of a switch, it is difficult to recover costs. Programs are designed to place heavy emphasis on the accompanying print material thereby encouraging serious viewers to register for the program;

- Programs need to be structured to meet the level of the knowledgeable professional not the bottom 30 percent. Hence programs may not make sense to lay viewers;

- Interaction can be difficult to engender since professionals are expressing opinions which can be heard throughout the province. Further, in 'good' continuing professional education programs, the emphasis is on the application of theory to practice, and the use of learners' experiences as essential data in designing learning experiences. Because of the public nature of the medium, a learner in a small rural centre is unlikely to describe a client's problems over the satellite since the client may be also watching. We found this a particular problem in one of our Social Work courses and now recognize how we should have designed the learner package to accommodate this.

Credit courses do not have these problems. Instead we have found our enrollments continue to increase and the demand for courses is starting to exceed the satellite time available. Partly as a result, we have begun to enlarge our delivery options. In the Fall term, 1983 for example, we will be offering via satellite Nursing and Public Administration credit courses and two continuing professional education courses in Social Work and Environment Science, the latter titled: "All you never wanted to know about waste sewage or were afraid to ask". We will also have two Social Work print-based credit courses, a Childcare credit course using audio-conferencing, video, print and tutor support, and a Computer Management course using print, video and computer disks. This does not include short-term audio conferences of 1-3 sessions, and the reuse of previously prepared materials.

There is little doubt that professionals appreciate the ready access to up-to-date information, the ability to obtain further credentials, the opportunity to talk to other professionals about their own specialty, the chance to consult with other professionals and access which allows them to feel part of the mainstream in continuing education. The use of distance education delivery methods makes continuing professional education not only practicable but also preferable for the practicing professional since it allows for the provision of colleague interaction without removing learner independence.

We hope to obtain a second service on the satellite in another year. This service which can only be accessed at receiving sites by paid subscribers will probably carry most of our professional programming. It is exciting to look forward to.

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